

CLASS 52 - BEHAALOSCHA

by Rabbi Heshy Grossman

"Our Rabbis taught: 'VaYehi BiNesoa HaAron, VaYomer Moshe' - G-d marked this Parsha above and below, saying that this is not its proper place."

"Rebbi said: It is not for this, but rather, because this Sefer is considered a book unto itself." (Shabbos 115b)

The two verses describing the travels of the Aron Kodesh are delineated with two reverse 'Nun's, indicating that this section stands on its own merit, separate and distinct from the rest of Sefer BaMidbar.

The use of the letter 'Nun' is not coincidental, and in these two marks lie the foundation of an entire Sefer Torah, one that contains the same sanctity as the complete five books.

In our shiur this week, we will learn the secret of this letter and the Parsha it encompasses, and why it stands in the middle of the alphabet, the basis of our world.

1

The creation of Olam HaZeh is only one part of a process of Divine revelation, with every aspect of life contributing to the unfolding of G-d's plan. Ironically, this revelation can be achieved only by G-d concealing His true essence, for full disclosure of the truth would overpower and obliterate everything else.

The real order of life exists in a higher dimension, while the worldly arrangement that we know of is only an alternative existence, one that hides HaKadosh Baruch Hu. But at the same time, this world also provides an opportunity for the righteous man to discover the truth, enabling the freedom of choice that is man's only distinction.

The Torah that we know of is our guide to truth, directing man in this world. But, this too, is only one minute aspect of the complete Torah, for the depths of Torah have a scope far greater and deeper than anything we are conscious of.

"And from where is Chachmah to be found, and where is the place of Binah. No man knows its value, nor can it be found in the land of the living." (Iyov 28:12-13)

Even the prophets cannot know the true source of Torah and wisdom, for the secrets of existence are by definition beyond our own world.

This is the 'Sha'ar HaNun' - the fiftieth gate - an aspect of Torah hidden even to Moshe Rabbeinu. While our world revolves around forty-nine varied traits, the axis of all existence is the point at its center, the invisible middle that never moves.

Hence, the sanctity associated with the number fifty, as in the jubilee year, or the fiftieth day of Sefiras HaOmer, one that is itself not counted, but is nevertheless approached with awe and anticipation. And on this very day, the Torah is given, as Klal Yisrael brings this higher existence down to earth.

For these reasons, the 'Nun' rests squarely in the middle of the alphabet, with thirteen letters on either side. As in every gateway, the center point between two dimensions serves as a gallery for each side, and the letter 'Nun' alludes to that higher order that lies beyond our grasp.

Were this order known to all, mankind would be overwhelmed by the brilliance of the Divine, and cease to exist as an independent entity. In a sense, the Torah that we have in our own hands is written in a different sequence than the Torah in heaven, one that is inappropriate for mortal man.

It is this idea that is alluded to by the Parsha of 'VaYehi BiNesoa' - the section of the Torah that is moved from its proper place. Our very world has been moved from its place, and the Parsha of the Aron will lead us on the road back home.

Let us explain.

2

The juxtaposition of the Parsha of the Aron in this precise location is to serve as a barrier and separation between two distinct calamities that changed Jewish life forever. On the one hand, Klal Yisrael leaves Har Sinai, removed from the exalted levels that had been perceived while standing under the mountain of G-d. And subsequently, they begin their complaints of life in the desert, uncommitted to the faith and trust necessary for the travels in the Midbar.

This before and after sequence defines the two separate books of BaMidbar. On the one hand is Klal Yisrael in its ideal state, headed directly to the promised land. Afterwards, Klal Yisrael is struck by one disaster after the other, and their entry into Israel is delayed till the next generation. Even after they finally arrive, these sins of the desert assure that their stay is only temporary, and they are destined to travel 'to the desert of the nations' for a long and bitter exile.

'VaYehi BiNesoa' is right in between, the bridge that will lead them back to the other side, connecting them still to the world they once knew.

In a world where Klal Yisrael is faithful to G-d's command, serving as trustworthy witness to the Divine purpose of creation, G-d's plan is evident and clear, and directly at hand.

But, when the Jewish people sin, and the purpose of creation is clouded and dim, the word of G-d is distant and removed, unfathomable to the observer of world events.

Here we learn this: Even in this state of disrepair, the Aron travels with them still.

The travels of the Jewish people symbolize the unfolding of Hashem's goal for creation, the slow and steady disclosure of all that He wishes to reveal. Were Klal Yisrael to have remained in the state of purity acquired at Sinai, this process would be completed hastily, with no obstacles delaying the merger of this world with the next.

But, the sins of the desert detours all of life, and Klal Yisrael must muck their way through the mud, struggling to bring the word of G-d to light.

And still, the Aron, and the presence of G-d it contains, remains with them forever.

Far from its place, and certainly far from order, the Divine plan is manifest in the trials and tribulations of each generation, actualized by the Jewish people everywhere they turn.

Ya'akov has two names. His higher name -Yisrael - is the appellation he receives after the struggle with evil. This is the straight and honest path of Yeshurun, revealed after he has vanquished the angel of darkness.

But the name Ya'akov hints of something else - the dark and lower part of life, the heel of existence, far removed from the head that contains the thought and plan for creation. Here too, Klal Yisrael will learn how to survive, gaining the skills to overcome the treacheries and deception of the nations that hope to divert them from their goal.

BeGimatria - "BiNesoa" equals "Ya'akov".

Out of order and out of place, the Jewish people find themselves despondent and dislocated. But, they are the mirror image of the Divine presence, and if they are disconsolate, they find solace in the Aron that has known no rest.

The Aron is anchored to the Kodesh HaKodashim, and though it has very precise measures, it takes up no space. It represents the world in microcosm, a world of limitations and defined dimensions, but one that contains within it an allusion to a world beyond all limits, above time and space.

Though Klal Yisrael has wandered, straying from the road that is straight and near, the Aron will restore them to their rightful spot, and heaven and earth will meet one again.

The 'Nun' will turn around to its rightful position, restoring all of life to the place where it is destined to be.

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"Come and see, these two 'Nunin' are the actual honor of Hashem, and the basis of the world....and Hashem removed the nations of the world from the grouping of these two 'Nunin'....and for these 'Nunin' the nations of the world are always harassing the B'nai Yisrael..." (Zohar Chadash)

How can these two letters be the cause for centuries of anti-Semitism?

Klal Yisrael receives the Torah in the Midbar, where they discover their natural habitat. Under Har Sinai they learn this: other than Torah - nothing else exists.

But, when they subsequently sin, they lose their way, and G-d banishes them to a different sort of desert.

"And that which comes to your mind, will never come about, your saying: 'we will be like the nations, like the families of the lands, worshipping wood and stone. As I live, said Hashem with a mighty hand, and an outstretched arm, and with anger poured out, I will be king over you.....'"

"V'Heiveisi Eschem El Midbar Ha'Amim.... - and I will bring you to the desert of the nations...." (Yechezkel 20:32-35)

Here in this desert, Klal Yisrael lives in an alternative existence. Still removed from the rest of mankind, but forced to suffer through the long and arduous process of a redemption that cannot be seen.

It is the hatred and enmity of the nations that reveals this truth, in their own macabre manner. 'Life in the big city is not for you', they shout, in varied different ways, and slowly the old and dusty truths are once again revealed - Klal Yisrael has only one true home. Between the two staves of the Aron, all Klal Yisrael sequesters, and there they read the book of their own history, two short verses that contain all they need to know.

"VaYehi BiNesoa HaAron - VaYomer Moshe: 'Arise Hashem, and let your enemies be scattered, let those who hate You flee from before You.'"

"And when it rested he would say: 'Return, Hashem to the myriad thousands of Israel.'"

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